

**Potential Research Topics for ARSOF Graduate Students,
as of 09 Feb 2015**

Research Topic	Explanation	Source	Date Added	Date Command Approved
Discrete, multi-year Campaigns to Shape, Prevent and / or Win	How does SOF design, plan and conduct discrete, multi-year Irregular campaigns that synergize tactical and operational Special Warfare and Surgical Strike with the full suite of SOF / CF / JIIM and partner capabilities and objectives to shape the operating environment, counter threats and advance U.S. interests prior to a threat or crisis necessitating large-scale military intervention?	USASOC G-9	23-Dec-14	Dec-14
SOF Mission Command	How does ARSOF build and maintain modern, scalable C2 structures that ensure SOF Mission Command meets the needs of the future operational environment, from small, technologically-enabled C2 nodes which maximize reach-back to the CONUS base, through GO led SOJTF commands to larger hybrid SOF / CF / JIIM structures?	USASOC G-9	23-Dec-14	Dec-14
Countering Unconventional Warfare	How does ARSOF covertly, clandestinely or overtly support friends and partners and deter, degrade or defeat global competitors, enemies and aggressors with or through indigenous means in denied areas using extant and future UW capabilities in support of SOF / CF / JIIM operational and strategic objectives?	USASOC G-9	23-Dec-14	Dec-14
Operation Within and Supporting Global Networks	How does ARSOF establish persistent and distributed human and technical networks, and build human and physical infrastructure in the context of the Global SOF Network and Global Landpower Networks, to enable success in irregular and traditional operations across the ROMO?	USASOC G-9	23-Dec-14	Dec-14
Army, Joint and Interagency Interdependence	How does ARSOF optimize partnerships and reinforce supported and supporting relationships within SOF / CF / JIIM structural constructs to achieve operational and strategic effects and minimize risk in irregular and traditional operations across the ROMO?	USASOC G-9	23-Dec-14	Dec-14
Operating Across Joint Interagency and Multinational Seams	How does ARSOF bridge critical seams between Joint, Interagency and Multinational partners to conduct operations under Title 10 Authorities, Title 50 Authorities and/or the Ambassador's Title 22 Authorities to necessary for SOF / CF / JIIM success in the future, complex operating environment?	USASOC G-9	23-Dec-14	Dec-14
Advancing SOF / CF / JIIM Operational and Strategic Planning and Thought	How does ARSOF socialize and integrate forward thinking capabilities and concepts regarding discrete, multi-year, high-return campaigns and operations focused on defeating threats, providing physical, cognitive and moral security, and/or adequate governance in the Human Domain.	USASOC G-9	23-Dec-14	Dec-14

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Optimize ARSOF Force Generation	How does ARSOF flexibly and efficiently generate, expand or contract its human and materiel capabilities and capacity to provide joint force commanders with capable, scalable ARSOF comprised of the finest, operationally and tactically proficient, culturally aware leaders and operators wielding the latest, technology and advanced equipment.	USASOC G-9	23-Dec-14	Dec-14
Develop a metrics model for security force assistance and/or foreign internal defense.	Develop a metrics model to quantify the activities of security force assistance (SFA) and/or foreign internal defense (FID) that: 1) enables effective tracking of long-term operational and strategic ramifications and 2) justifies continued support and resources from policy makers and appropriations leaders.	Aaron Southard, MAJ, USAJFKSWCS, aaron.j.southard@ahqb.soc.mil	4-Nov-15	
The Fundamentals of “Wars Amongst the People” and What They Mean to U.S. policy for the employment of SOF	The U.S. government's understanding of modern warfare is complicated, inconsistent, and changing too frequently to be useful for the long-term. General Sir Rupert Smith articulated modern warfare as “wars amongst the people” to separate it from the traditional western understanding of industrial, fire power-based attrition warfare. His book and many other books, articles, lectures, and presentations have sought to describe what makes modern war different, but none so definitively as to be commonly accepted. We have yet to question our most deeply-seated assumptions as articulated by our doctrine, national policies, and national strategies that originate in the writings and exploits of Napoleon, Clausewitz, Jomini, Boyd, Grant, Lee, Sherman, Liddel-Hart, and others. What are the true roots of modern warfare when Clausewitz's Trinity does not apply (as in “wars amongst the people”) and survival equates to victory? What should the U.S. government do differently to prepare the nation for war and engage in modern war?	Matt Erlacher, USASOC G-5, matthew.erlacher@soc.mil	15-Jan-15	
Strategic Developments in Special Operations: Why and How They Happened, with Lessons for the Future	The modern American experience with special operations has a checkered past. Since the creation of the Office of the Coordinator of Information in 1941, the U.S. government has seen fit to implement numerous legislative and strategic military changes that have culminated in the current USSOCOM and component commands. While several histories have been written about the components and USSOCOM, none have approached the depth of knowledge required to holistically understand precisely what significant stakeholders thought about the problems the solutions were meant to solve and why they took the positions they did. Why did those individuals or organizations who proposed those solutions do so, and what lobbying and counter-lobbying occurred and why? What made for good legislation and what holes were left by certain declarations or laws enacted? What work remains to be done to more perfectly form a national special operations capability that could have been solved by previous legislation, and why was it left undone? What lessons are there for future SOF development?	Matt Erlacher, USASOC G-5, matthew.erlacher@soc.mil	15-Jan-15	

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Future Technologies as a Threat	The recent explosive growth of technology for many, sometime dual, purposes continues to expand and evolve. There are some USG agencies that interpret dire implications from this explosive growth and diffusion of emergent technologies; the net effect will be prohibitive constraints or extremely high risk for military and intelligence operations. What has not been asked, however, is what are the risks to SOF in the future operating environment? Specifically, what are the future technology-based threats to SOF operators across the range of military and special operations? These threats are not limited to combat, nor do they necessarily originate in military-specific applications. The future of the Internet of Things, “smart” cars and appliances, near-ubiquitous wi-fi and RF transmitters & receivers, and the universal threat of identification security and hacking all culminate in a seemingly high-risk environment for even the most common-place deployments and exercises. Does this have to be? Can we overcome these threats—or even better—how can we benefit from these same technologies for our operators’ safety and effectiveness? How can collaboration help?	Matt Erlacher, USASOC G-5, matthew.erlacher@soc.mil	15-Jan-15	
Special Operations in the Dark: Continuity of global special operations post-national or post-global catastrophic event	Continuity of special operations capabilities and activities is an under-analyzed contingency. A catastrophic disruption or destruction of critical regional, national or global systems can be deliberate (man-made), accidental (man-made), or disastrous (naturally-occurring). Significantly, the US Government has set dangerous precedence for cyber warfare. The President’s 2012 admission of the US and Israeli collaboration in the Stuxnet attack on Iranian nuclear facilities’ systems has given a de facto green light to competitor and enemy states and non-state groups to develop systems and processes by which they may attempt to do the same to our critical national systems. Also, our national electric grid and Internet networks are vulnerable to electromagnetic and physical damage due to cosmic or terrestrial events (e.g. solar storms and earthquakes). Given the interconnectedness and vulnerabilities of America’s core systems, SOF should prepare for the worst-case scenario, so SOF can continue to serve the nation at perhaps her hour of greatest need. The study need not focus on the “why” we lost power or communications capability, however on the question; how do we overcome various levels of diminished or lost capability or capacity in communications, administration, movement, and support to SOF operations and installations? How do we mitigate or circumvent such disruptions so that we may continue to operate and provide the unique capabilities for which SOF was designed? How does SOF conduct a strategic counterstrike when the Internet and all other forms of electronic communications are no longer available?	Matt Erlacher, USASOC G-5, matthew.erlacher@soc.mil	15-Jan-15	

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Educating the SOF Civilian Work Force	The USSOCOM Commander seeks to have the best educated force in DOD. The work force is not made up solely of uniformed members, but also includes thousands of civilian employees. Many of these employees remain assigned to various SOF commands—and represent the intellectual continuity of those commands—for a decade or more, yet their implicit and tacit knowledge and credentials grow slowly and incrementally, if at all. Currently the only method used to increase the expertise of the civilian work force is hiring practices. Instead, we could invest in our current work force and increase both the workers' individual expertise as well as the general expertise and credentialing of the command and the greater SOF community. To prioritize the efforts to do so, we must look at the professional career fields and academic areas most critical to the future of SOF development and match those needs with opportunities available via the wide range of American and international academic and intellectual institutions. And the benefits span the SOF priorities.	Matt Erlacher, USASOC G-5, matthew.erlacher@soc.mil	15-Jan-15	
Identifying, Assessing, Developing and Motivating Potential Partners in Irregular Warfare	Background/Context: The insurgency in Syria attempting to overthrow the al-Asad regime has highlighted opportunities and extraordinary policy dilemmas regarding the employment of Unconventional Warfare in environments with contending insurgent factions, some whose intentions are inimical to U.S. interests. This is not a new problem, given that U.S., Saudi, and Pakistani support for the Afghan mujahideen in the 1980s helped create the environment and infrastructure from which al Qaeda emerged. The challenge of problematic partnering is not constrained to Unconventional Warfare. U.S. Foreign Internal Defense efforts in El Salvador placed the U.S. in partnership with a military force closely associated with severe human rights abuses that presented a chronic obstacle to effective counterinsurgency and U.S. support throughout the course of that conflict. These abuses were partially mitigated, but never satisfactorily addressed, until the conclusion of the conflict in a negotiated peace settlement that included provisions for comprehensive political, judicial and security reform. The changes required in all these instances to better reconcile our potential partners' behavior and interests were more than could be affected at the tactical level. As the U.S. seeks to develop "innovative, small-footprint" approaches to securing its interests, Special Warfare is a natural space to seek potential solutions. But for the U.S to effectively employ its Special Warfare capabilities, the U.S. must learn how to better manage and shape its sometimes problematic partners from the organizational to strategic level, or risk undermining the effectiveness of one of its most valuable capabilities. b. Problem Statement: What are the best practices and other mechanisms for understanding, identifying, assessing, developing and motivating potential partners' behavior, objectives, organization, and composition to successfully partner with SOF?	Dan Hilliker, USASOC G-5, hilliked@soc.mil	15-Jan-15	

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Role of SOF in Political Warfare	Background/Context: Economic globalization, nuclear stalemate, and U.S. dominance of traditional warfare (force projection, major combat operations) change the face of warfare for the foreseeable future. Nation States and Non-State Groups that possess the elements of statecraft (diplomacy, finance, information, military) are adapting to the environment and circumstances to develop and implement strategies and achieve objectives that would have previously been accomplished through traditional warfare. To name a few - Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela are executing formal strategies to combat U.S. strengths in order to gain geopolitical concessions, advantages, and advancements. These strategies can best be codified as political warfare (POLWAR).	Dan Hilliker, USASOC G-5, hilliked@soc.mil	15-Jan-15	
Evaluating the impacts of trauma on decision-making processes in country.	Studies have shown that physical and emotional trauma can cause significant changes to an individual's decision-making processes. Traumatic experiences can generate substantial changes, both temporarily and permanently, in how an individual decision-maker approaches issues involving fairness, compassion, self-preservation, finances, cultural identity, and religion. More broadly, how does trauma impact the decision-making processes and actions of both military personnel and civilian populations in country? What strategies can SOF use to operate more effectively and to achieve mission successes in country by assessing the impacts that traumatic experiences can have on societal attributes and host nation decision-making?	Mark Roland, CW2, USAJFKSWCS, rolandm@soc.mil	8-Jan-15	
Assessing the need for a SOF Code of Professional Conduct that provides guidance on ethical leadership.	As American society has become more concerned with issues involving ethical lapses and deficiencies in leadership, professions have developed and strengthened their respective codes of conduct and ethical rules in response. For the profession of arms, ethical leadership epitomizes the strength of military leaders to support a unit's success in carrying out missions through applicable constitutional and civil laws in addition to relevant social and ethnic considerations. Does the SOF community need a SOF-specific Code of Professional Conduct to provide guidance and promote the attributes of ethical leaders within our community?	Mark Roland, CW2, USAJFKSWCS, rolandm@soc.mil	8-Jan-15	
Given the rise of Megacities, what could be done right now with unclassified sources to increase visibility in a specific megacity, such as Lagos?		Scot Miller, Naval Postgraduate School, samille1@nps.edu	6-Feb-15	

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Influence diagrams and their potential use in understanding the dynamics of special operations. (http://www.dodccrp.org/events/16th_icrts_2011/papers/063.pdf)		Scot Miller, Naval Postgraduate School, samille1@nps.edu	6-Feb-15	
Determine what the current baseline for the Regional SOC's planning processes, what are the desired capabilities, and what are the gaps.		Scot Miller, Naval Postgraduate School, samille1@nps.edu	6-Feb-15	